

# Primary Care Guidance: Rehabilitation for Children and Youth Presenting with Post COVID-19 Condition

## Purpose

This quick reference tool offers guidance about **referral to rehabilitation** for children and youth (<18 years of age) presenting with Post COVID-19 Condition in Alberta. It combines the best available evidence from the published literature with consensus-based clinical expertise from a provincial working group and will be revised as new evidence becomes available. This guidance is to be used in conjunction with **clinical judgment and availability** of local rehabilitation services.

## Definition









In October 2021, the World Health Organization developed this [clinical case definition](#)<sup>1</sup> of Post COVID-19 Condition (also known as long COVID or Persistent Post COVID) through a Delphi consensus.

Post COVID-19 condition occurs in individuals with a history of probable or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection, usually 3 months from the onset of COVID-19 with symptoms that last for at least 2 months and cannot be explained by an alternative diagnosis. Common symptoms include fatigue, shortness of breath, cognitive dysfunction but also others...which generally have an impact on everyday functioning. Symptoms may be new onset, following initial recovery from an acute COVID-19 episode, or persist from the initial illness. Symptoms may also fluctuate or relapse over time.<sup>1</sup>

A separate definition for children and youth has not yet been developed. However, it has been shown that Post COVID-19 Condition can affect anyone, regardless of age.<sup>2</sup> Identifying Post COVID-19 Condition in children and youth is complicated due to the variability of presenting symptoms, and by the challenge that children and youth are less able to describe their symptoms.<sup>3</sup>

## Symptoms

Common reported symptoms of Post COVID-19 condition in children and youth include:<sup>2,4-15</sup>

 Fatigue & weakness	 Activity intolerance	 Shortness of breath	 Headache
 Concentration, mood, memory & irritability	 Muscle & joint pain	 Difficulty sleeping & insomnia	 Sensory problems

## Prevalence

Firm data on prevalence and symptoms is difficult to determine due to study limitations, varying definitions of symptoms, time frames, and/or severity. Reported incidence varies greatly from 0% to up to 66% however some clinicians have proposed that between 5% and 10% of children will present with Post COVID-19 Condition.<sup>8, 16, 17</sup> Symptoms have also been identified in children and youth without a history of COVID infection leading to the impression that some symptoms may be somatic.<sup>4, 15</sup> Potential risk factors include children and youth who are overweight or obese or have preexisting asthma, eczema, or allergic disease.<sup>17, 18</sup>

## Management

Following assessment and diagnosis of Post COVID-19 Condition or suspected Post COVID-19 Condition, management should include **early recognition** and **support with multidisciplinary care addressing both physical and psychosocial needs**. Self-management and rehabilitation appear to be the main treatment with a biopsychosocial approach focusing on the individual's goals and relieving symptoms while preventing further complications rather than diagnosis or testing. There is no evidence supporting medical management of symptoms such as fatigue.

### 3R's on the Road to Recovery

<p><b>Recognize</b> the symptoms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children often cannot describe or explain their symptoms; they will require families and clinicians to watch for and monitor trends in participation and behavior</li> <li>• Presence of persistent symptoms</li> <li>• Reduced participation in daily activities at home or in the community including school</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reassure</b> the child / youth and family</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Acknowledge</b> symptoms and <b>affirm</b> their impact to the child/youth and family</li> <li>• <b>Encourage</b> the use of self-management resources (see below)</li> <li>• Clinical interventions are available to:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Enhance</b> long-term function and development</li> <li>○ <b>Maximize</b> activity and participation</li> <li>○ <b>Prevent</b> complications or additional medical interventions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Refer</b> to rehabilitation services</p>	<p><i>Currently, there are <b>no</b> specified AHS pediatric rehabilitation services for Post COVID-19 condition. Children and families may access existing pediatric rehabilitation services.</i></p> <p><b>For recovery advice and information for persistent symptoms lasting more than 4 weeks call:</b>  <a href="tel:1-833-379-0563">Rehabilitation Advice Line 1-833-379-0563</a></p> <p><b>For pediatric rehabilitation services for persistent symptoms impacting function for more than 12 weeks:</b>  <b>Eligibility:</b> Children and youth are eligible for rehabilitation if they experience <b>significant changes in function</b> due to illness.  <b>When to refer:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence of persistent symptoms lasting <b>more than 12 weeks</b> that impact daily function and participation in meaningful activities (school, hobbies, socialization, recreation).</li> <li>• A <b>substantial decline</b> in the child or youth's health or function that is not expected to resolve without rehabilitation and that if not addressed would have a <b>negative impact</b> on their health-related quality of life.</li> </ul> <p><b>How to refer:</b>            Healthcare providers should consult the <a href="#">Alberta Referral Directory</a> service referral information for Allied Health and Rehabilitation services prior to referral. Services listed below offer rehabilitation care to children and youth who meet the above eligibility criteria. This is not an exhaustive list, please see <a href="#">AHS Pediatric Rehabilitation website</a> for a detailed listing by service need.</p>

Refer to rehabilitation services	<p><b>Referral contact information by zone:</b></p> <p><b>South Zone:</b> Parents and Legal Guardians to Self-Refer  <b>West - <a href="#">Audiology and Children's Allied Health Services</a></b>  Coordinated intake phone line <b>1-888-388-6575, 403-388-6575</b></p> <p><b>East - <a href="#">Audiology and Children's Allied Health Services</a></b>  Coordinated intake phone line <b>403-529-8966</b></p> <p><b>Calgary Zone:</b> Parents and Legal Guardians to Self-Refer  Pediatric Community Rehabilitation: <b>403-910-2070</b></p> <p><b>Calgary Zone (rural):</b> Parents and Legal Guardians to Self-Refer  Rural Pediatric Allied Health: <b>403-995-2638</b></p> <p><b>Central Zone:</b>  Children's Rehabilitation Services, Coordinated Intake phone line <b>1-855-414-5272</b></p> <p><b>Edmonton Zone:</b> Parents and Legal Guardians to Self-Refer  Allied Health Community Central Access: <b>780-735-3489</b></p> <p><b>North Zone:</b>  Cold Lake, Bonnyville, St. Paul Area <b>780-840-8504</b>  Lac La Biche, Smoky Lake, Smoky Lake, Redwater Area <b>780-213-1271</b>  High Prairie, Slave Lake, Wabasca Area <b>780-849-5101 (ext. 572)</b>  Onoway, Westlock, Barrhead Area <b>780-342-1446</b>  Jasper, Hinton, Edson, Whitecourt Area <b>780-651-7237</b>  High Level Area <b>780-841-3244</b> (Occupational Therapy)  Peace River, Fairview, Grimshaw Area <b>780-624-7500</b> (Occupational Therapy)  Grande Prairie and Surrounding Rural Area <b>780-830-0606</b>  Fort McMurray Area <b>780-791-6202</b></p>
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### More information

<p>Many currently available resources are adult focused, adjust to meet the child &amp; youth's needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">AHS Getting Healthy after COVID-19: Resources for Patients</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">AHS Recovery and Rehabilitation After COVID-19: Resources for Health Professionals</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">MyHealth.Alberta.ca Self-Management Resources</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">AHS Children &amp; Youth Addiction &amp; Mental Health website</a></li> </ul>
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## References

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